



FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY OF RIVERS ALLIANCE OF CONNECTICUT

February 17, 2017

**To: Chairmen Sen. Paul Formica, Sen. Catherine Osten,
Rep. Toni Walker; and Honorable Members of the Committee:**

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut is a statewide, non-profit coalition of river organizations, individuals, and businesses formed to protect Connecticut's waters by promoting sound water policies, uniting and strengthening the state's many watershed groups, and providing education on water stewardship.

Re: H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

**Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP)**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony at this public hearing. I know this is an extremely difficult year, but I hope that the state will support a basic budget for environmental work. Connecticut is starting to regress in protecting its uniquely valuable environmental resources. (Thanks in part to our geology, split between two tectonic plates, we feature an unusual diversity in landscape and wildlife.)

CEQ: There has never been a more important time for independent reporting on science and the environment. The federal government is pulling down its science pages and silencing staff at the Environmental Protection Agency. In Connecticut, the entity that can be counted on to report to the public, without bias, on the overall condition of our environment and natural resources is the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). It is also the one place a citizen can go with a complaint about environmental management and be sure of getting a fair hearing and helpful response. CEQ also provides policy makers with carefully researched recommendations for changes in law and regulation.

All this is done for \$174,000 per year. We estimate that CEQ saves the state many times more that amount in staff time, legislators' time, consultants' fees, and litigation. CEQ's reports would have to be done by someone. The state needs a basic overview of its environmental status. DEEP does not have the resources to do this. There are several bills introduced each year requiring DEEP to be more responsive. The situation would be much worse if CEQ did not take responsibility for many complex responses.

The elimination of CEQ does not make financial sense. Connecticut has always valued facts, science, and the protection of natural resources. CEQ represents and implements those values.

DEEP. The agency is already unable to perform many basic protective functions in terms of limiting pollution and protecting resources. Chronic poor performance in certain wastewater-treatment facilities and haz waste facilities usually is passed over. Last year, there was a backlog of hundreds of problematic construction sites that needed a field inspection, with only one staffer available, and she (an expert) was out on sick leave for a time. Long delayed cleanups of contamination cause unmeasured harm, and the resolution of the problem is sometimes less than optimal. DEEP is no longer able to get out to towns to assist with wetlands protection, and provides little support of any kind; helping local wetlands commissioners used to be a strength in the agency. Further cuts to the DEEP budget would put the environment and people's health at risk.

Thank you for your hard work on very difficult problems. Rivers Alliance would be pleased to answer any questions.

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